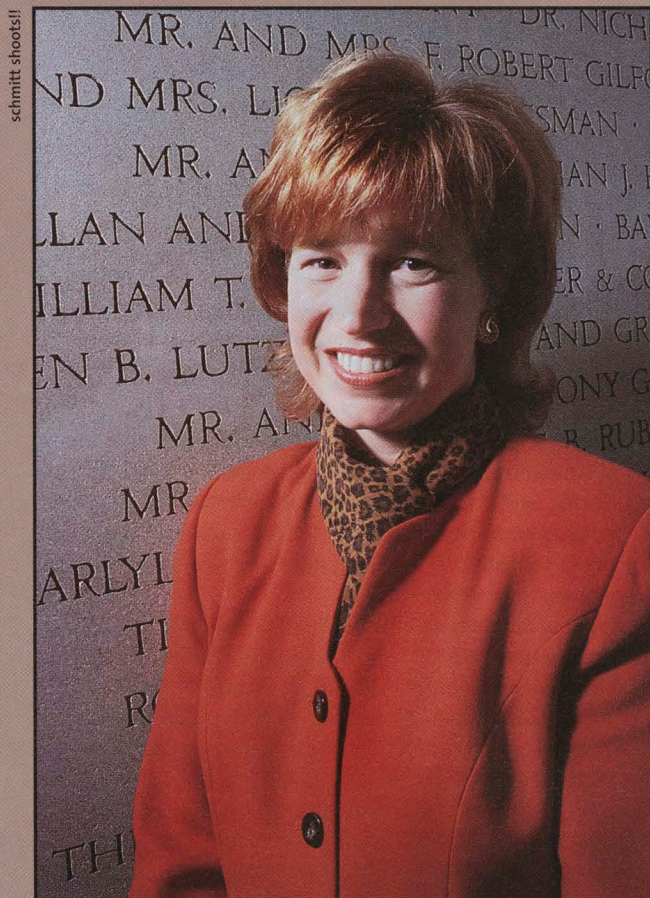


C i t a f f r c l e



As director of the Parents Office, Colleen O'Connor Bench acts as a liaison between SU and students' parents. She fields questions, helps parents when their students are faced with emergencies, and organizes special events.

**"Our main mission is to help
parents help students learn
to help themselves."**

—Colleen O'Connor Bench

The Parent Connection

Colleen O'Connor Bench begins a busy morning in the Parents Office by juggling two phone calls. First she checks on the status of Leslie Marciano '00, an SU student who was seriously injured in a fall early in the semester. In a tone that is equal parts genuine concern and calm efficiency, Bench confirms that Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw and astronaut Eileen Collins '78 will visit Marciano in the hospital later that day.

The second call is to a parent who left an "urgent" voice mail message. "What can I help you with?" Bench asks, ready to cope with any situation. There's no emergency this time; the parent merely needs information regarding Parents Weekend registration. Not urgent, certainly, considering the other issues Bench deals with. Yet she treats this conversation with the same professionalism and respect she brings to a crisis situation. "This is the challenge of a one-person office," she says.

Bench is director of the Parents Office, established in 1972 by then-Chancellor Melvin A. Eggers. The office is part of SU's Division of Student Affairs, which Bench indicates is an important distinction compared with parents offices at most other universities. "My colleagues at other institutions focus primarily on fund raising," Bench says. "The Parents Office at SU is totally service oriented."

The office serves three main functions, Bench says. The first is to provide information and referrals to parents, offering a "triage," as Bench calls it. "We help when we can, and redirect questions when we can't," she says. "I can explain how to calculate a grade point average or change a minor. But I'll refer them to their college to handle a grievance against a professor or problems with curriculum."

The second responsibility of the Parents Office is crisis intervention. In any campus emergency that necessitates parental involvement—including accidents, student arrests, or mental health issues—Bench is one of the University's key representatives. "I'm there to meet parents whenever they arrive," she says. "My job is to facilitate the family's needs in any way I can."

While her role in crisis intervention is demanding, Bench believes positive things can grow from such situations. "It gives us a chance to show we're human, not just an institution," she says. "At SU, I have found that colleagues come out of the woodwork to help."

The third function of the Parents Office is to sponsor special events. Bench organizes parental activities for such campus events as Preview, Opening Weekend, and Commencement, and coordinates Parents Weekend each fall.

While not one of its official duties, the office also helps parents deal with empty-nest syndrome—as SU students learn to handle life's challenges, the Parents Office helps their parents learn to let go. "Our main mission is to help parents help students learn to help themselves," Bench says. "Part of a student's education at SU is

learning life skills—everything from getting along with a new roommate to dealing with an uncooperative landlord.”

Bench is grateful for the contributions of generous parents and volunteers who help her do her job well. She relies heavily on the students, parents, and SU staff members who assist with special events; values input from the National Parents Board; and counts on financial contributions made to the Parents Office Special Needs Fund. Bench welcomes such donations to supplement her office's small budget. “The Parents Office pays for hotel accommodations for parents who are visiting a student in crisis,” she says. “We purchased books for a student experiencing financial strain because her father died during the summer. We couldn’t provide these services without the donations we receive.”

A parent herself, Bench and husband Ron have a 4-year-old daughter, Erin Kelsey. Bench, who comes from a large Irish-Catholic family, happily admits her personal life is completely family-centered. “With a job like mine, you’re on call 24 hours a day,” she says. “I count on the support I get from home, from my phenomenal husband and our extended family. I love my job, but I couldn’t do it without them.”

—AMY SHIRES

Fielding the Rigors of Dome Life

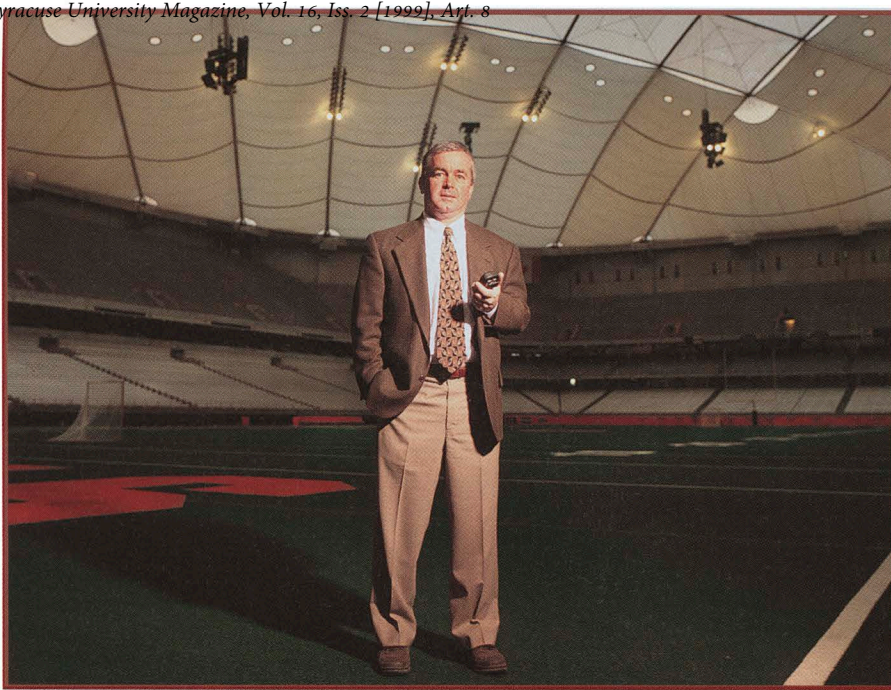
Pat Campbell, managing director of the Carrier Dome, wasn’t easy to track down last spring and summer. For months, barricades surrounded the Dome, security was a high priority, and Campbell’s time—always at a premium—was in greater demand than ever. Why all the commotion? Campbell and his staff were caught up in a race against the clock as construction crews installed and inflated the new Dome roof.

The enormity of the project compounded Campbell’s responsibilities overseeing general operations at the Dome, and booking events. But Campbell and the 25 full-time staff members he supervises did their best to keep the roof replacement in perspective. “The project certainly added to our usual workload,” he says. “I looked at it as one very long event.”

Events are the cornerstones of Campbell’s annual schedule, and the Syracuse University Athletics Department is the source for most of them. “Syracuse University football, basketball, and lacrosse are the three major tenants at the Dome and they take priority,” he says. “Everything else has to fit around those schedules. It’s a juggling act.”

It’s also a routine Campbell knows well. He has been on the University staff since 1978, first working in internal audit, then as an assistant director and business manager for athletics. In 1986, Campbell was promoted to assistant director of the Dome, working under athletics director Jake Crouthamel. By the time Campbell assumed the role of managing director in 1991, he was tailor-made for the job. “I always have had a strong bond with the University,” he says. “I grew up here and SU was the team to root for. I remember those last couple of seasons in Archbold Stadium. So the prospect of bringing a major-college domed sports facility to Syracuse was fantastic, and now to be part of its operation is a dream come true.”

As a Syracuse native, Campbell understands the unique role the



Pat Campbell, managing director of the Carrier Dome, rarely has a quiet moment. When he’s not coordinating operations during an SU sports event at the Dome, he’s usually planning concerts or other activities for the facility.

schmitt shoots!!

Carrier Dome plays in the community. Primarily, it’s a campus sports facility. But because of its large seating capacity and strong presence on the Syracuse skyline, the Dome is an ambassador for the city as well, hosting some of the area’s biggest concerts and professional entertainment events.

Campbell plans at least two concerts and several non-campus entertainment events each year. Successful negotiations are often a direct result of Campbell’s knowledge of the local market. He says country-pop superstar Garth Brooks passed on playing the Carrier Dome for years, only to sell out two nights when he was finally booked in 1997.

SU will host the NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball Championship East Regional this March, and again in 2002. These are contracts the University pursued with fervor. “To be able to bring the East Regional here is a testament to the facility and to the staff’s ability to stage an event of that size,” Campbell says. “This indicates how important it is to have the Dome at SU, and it demonstrates how strong the support of the community is for an event like this.”

Concerts require the most coordination from Dome staff, but Campbell never takes the routine preparations of a home game for granted. “There are so many things to consider,” he says. “For me the most hectic times are right before the gates open, and right before kickoff. There is more traffic in the concourses then than at any other time.”

Campbell commends the efforts of Dome employees who are responsible for the smallest of details. “Compared to other facilities this size, we have a small staff that gets a heck of a lot done under some hectic conditions,” he says. “From the ticket office to the various operations systems, it’s a pretty huge operation. So, the less people notice what you do behind the scenes, the better things are working. That’s a tribute to our staff.”

For all the stress that comes with managing a facility that can hold nearly 50,000 fans, Campbell says he still relishes his role at the Carrier Dome. “I wouldn’t want to be any place else. This is the icing on the cake,” he says. “It’s just a great situation.”

—TAMMY DIDOMENICO